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ABSTRACT

The essays collected here describe events, trends, and issues in the development of language proficiency testing for African languages. Papers include: "A Brief History of Proficiency Testing" (Richard T. Thompson, Dora E. Johnson); "The 1986 Stanford ACTFL Training Workshop" (William Leben); "The 1987 Madison-MSU Team Workshop" (David Dwyer); "African Language Teaching and Oral Proficiency Testing" (Katherine Demuth); "The Role of Proficiency Evaluation in the 1987 Intensive Advanced Hausa Institute (GPA)" (Jennifer J. Yanco); "The 1988 Madison Workshop on ACTFL Certification" (Linda Hunter); "The 1989 UCLA Workshop on Team Testing" (Russell Schuh); and "Report on the Boston University Proficiency Workshop" (John Hutchison). Appended materials include a list of related federally-funded projects, descriptions of proficiency levels outlined by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), lists of first, second, and third priority African languages, a list of advantages and uses of oral proficiency assessment, and a list of individuals willing to review proficiency assessments for specific languages. Contains 13 references. (MSE)

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# Current Developments in Proficiency Evaluation for African Languages

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**African Studies Center, Michigan State University**

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# Current Developments
# in
# Proficiency Evaluation for African Languages

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East Lansing, 1990

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# CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PROFICIENCY EVALUATION FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGES

## INTRODUCTION

**David J. Dwyer**
*Michigan State University*

In the last ten years, the federally funded Title VI African Studies Centers have experienced increasing pressure to incorporate oral language proficiency evaluation into their African language programs.[1]

This emphasis is clearly articulated in the 1987 guidelines statement for Title VI African Studies Center applications, which specifies that these centers will be evaluated "by the scope of the competency-based language instruction which is being used or developed, the adequacy of instructional resources, and the nature of language proficiency requirements."[2]

The term "competency-based language instruction," according to the *Federal Register,* means "a training program which has defined functional language use objectives and whose evaluation measures for students can be linked to national standards."

Up until this point, the popular consensus among Africanist language teachers concerning language proficiency evaluation embraced the following points:

1. No effective measures existed for any language. While the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) approach to oral proficiency evaluation was reliable, the divisions or levels were so broad as to render them useless.

2. Given that the Title VI Centers have identified 82 major national or international African languages (out of a total of some 1500 African languages) for which instruction ought to be made available in this country, the task of establishing a national standard for each of these is impractical.[3]

3. Furthermore, such standards could not be easily established without seriously impairing certain approaches to or styles in language teaching, although most could see some advantages in such an evaluation metric.

Over the last ten years (beginning with a new directions conference in 1979 described in footnote 3), the Title VI Centers concluded that the most effective way to make use of limited monetary and material resources in providing quality instruction in the numerous African languages was to work coherently together in identifying, planning, and carrying out projects aimed at improving African language instruction in the United States.

Such efforts have led to a series of individual projects, which have re-

ceived the collective support of other Title VI institutions.[4] Such projects have included the writing of language learning textbooks and dictionaries; the identification, worldwide, of language learning resources–institutional, material, and individual; and a considerable amount of work in the area of oral proficiency evaluation.

Because this activity has been intense and considerable, the African language program coordinators have given progress reports at the last few African Studies Association Meetings. After our presentation at the Denver 1987 meetings, it was decided to publish a record of our progress. As a result, I have suggested to the language coordinators of each of the Title VI Centers that we assemble the current volume documenting our progress and our cooperative spirit in this endeavor.

In the process of coming to grips with the task of applying oral proficiency evaluation to African language learning, we have had to deal with the three concerns raised above. With respect to the concern of lack of scale, by subdividing the lower levels of the FSI, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) introduced a new oral language proficiency test. Now that there was an oral proficiency test available for evaluating the progress of foreign language students, it became the task of the Africanist language teaching community to determine its appropriateness for African languages. The results of which are reported in this collection.

## NOTES

[1]At the time of this writing, the Title VI African Studies Centers are Boston University, Indiana University, Michigan State University, Stanford University, University of California at Berkeley, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Florida, University of Illinois, University of Wisconsin, and Yale University. Stanford and Berkeley function administratively as a single center. Northwestern University, while previously funded, is not so currently.

[2]*Federal Register* 52. 191 (Oct 2, 1987) page 37069.

[3]This list of 82 languages, given here as Appendix C, was established at a 1979 Title VI African Studies Centers workshop entitled "African Language Instruction in the United States: Direction and Priorities for the 1980's reported by Dwyer and Wiley, 1981.

[4]A partial list of these activities is given in Appendix A.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROFICIENCY TESTING

**Richard T. Thompson**
**Dora E. Johnson**
*Center for Applied Linguistics*
*Washington, D.C.*

## GENERIC GUIDELINES AND THE LCTLS

The guidelines for language proficiency assessment have their roots in the efforts of the U.S. government's language training community. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Educational Testing Service spearheaded the movement to adapt the government Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) proficiency descriptions and guidelines for use in foreign language programs in colleges and universities. Since 1981, non-language programs served as a foundation for the development of revised curricula.

Much of the early work in developing the guidelines was based on Spanish, French, and German. As the circle widened to include languages such as Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic, it quickly became apparent that the original guidelines were too Eurocentric. The two most obvious problems were a bias toward grammatical categories of western European languages such as tense and gender and the concern that learners would require much time to master the principles and mechanics of a non-Roman writing system.

Efforts to expand the ACTFL guidelines to accommodate the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) began with the development of guidelines for Chinese, Japanese, and Russian and with the training for testers for these languages. Tester training for Arabic and Portuguese followed soon thereafter. Workshops and familiarization projects were expanded to include teachers of Hindi, Indonesian, and some African languages.

## ADAPTING THE GUIDELINES TO FIT SPECIFIC LCTLS

To apply the generic guidelines to the construction of proficiency descriptions for a particular language, the target language itself must be carefully assessed. Factors such as cultural context, appropriate content, and

what constitutes accuracy must be taken into account for each language. Theoretical problems in adapting the generic guidelines to a particular language include complex morphologies in Russian, diglossia in Arabic, the early appearance of register in Indonesian and Japanese, and the presence of Hindi-English code switching at high levels of proficiency among educated native Hindi speakers. The nature of writing systems such as those used in Chinese and Japanese also present a special challenge to the development of guidelines because the length of training required to learn these languages is greater than that required to learn Spanish or French.

Teachers of Arabic, for example, are now discussing ways in which various dialects of Arabic can be accommodated when testing for proficiency. The generic guidelines were developed to test a full range of oral proficiency, including informal conversation which, in Arabic, is generally conducted in the local dialect of Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the language of the print, and, to a considerable degree, of the broadcast media, is also widely used in more formal and international settings, although the extent to which native speakers will be prepared to switch registers varies considerably from one dialect to another. The general consensus at present is to seek a compromise while further study of the problems in developing guidelines for Arabic continues. Thus, when testing for proficiency in Arabic, tester and candidate replicate the situation in the Arab world itself by identifying through the interview process the common language base through which they can communicate. Testers will accept responses in MSA and/or any colloquial dialect with which they are familiar. Because an ability to communicate in both MSA and a dialect is characteristic of native speakers, proficiency in both MSA and a colloquial variety is required to achieve a "superior" rating in Arabic.

Another practical consideration is how to handle a language's sociolinguistic peculiarities when developing language-specific proficiency guidelines. For example, Indonesian requires immediate recognition of strict rules that govern appropriate style when addressing others. Hence, forms of address are taught from the very beginning in Indonesian courses, and the guidelines for Indonesian must reflect this and other necessary sociolinguistic rules that define human relationships and status peculiar to Indonesian society.

## TRAINING LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC TESTERS

Because language-specific tester training currently exists in only a handful of the LCTLs, it is likely that most initial training will be mediated through English or through another language known to the prospective

tester, for example, training through English or French for Asian and African specialists. Training might also be carried out in a language that is structurally similar to the target language, such as training through Russian in order to test in another Slavic language. Another solution is to pair the tester with a native speaker of the target language and allow the tester to work with the native speaker in a capacity similar to that used in the former linguist/informant method of language instruction. Thus, the trained tester guides the informant through the interview, and the two make a joint decision as to the final rating. It is also possible that semi-direct tests of oral proficiency will be developed and validated against the oral interview for those much less commonly taught languages for which developing a cadre of trained testers may not be possible in the near future.

## DEVELOPING COMPETENCY-BASED LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

The language training programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education are now required to provide sufficient evidence that they are making changes to include competency-based teaching and appropriate testing in their individual institutions. Programs are already beginning to institute different approaches to the development of language teaching materials and curricula. Proficiency is a major topic of concern at summer institutes. The African language teaching community has developed a set of common goals and priorities as well as possible avenues of coordination between centers. Semi-direct tests for the LCTLs are beginning to be developed based on the ACTFL guidelines and adapted for specific target languages. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has already developed semi-direct tests in Portuguese, Chinese, Hebrew, Indonesian, and Hausa, and the University of Pennsylvania has developed a semi-direct test for Hindi.

## LCTLS AND POLICY QUESTIONS

The appearance of recent legislation and regulations relating to proficiency testing and competency-based language programs has created a new set of policy questions that funding agencies and post-secondary institutions will have to face. The Education Amendments of 1986 included a number of significant changes in Title VI of the Higher Education Act (Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships Program, 1988), which is the legislative basis for several of the international education programs administered by the Center for International Education in the U.S. De-

partment of Education. There will be intense competition for the limited training resources currently available as universities seek to come into compliance with these legislative changes.[1] The U.S. Department of Education, academia, and the major professional foreign language associations will need to cooperate in setting realistic priorities and in developing the necessary guidelines. The most pressing question is one of deciding which languages or language groups are more important and should have guidelines developed first. The second pressing question is how the nearly 150 national resource centers and fellowships programs in foreign languages, area, and international studies, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education under Title VI of the Higher Education Act (Thompson, Thompson and Hiple, 1988). For a more complete disucssion of the issues concerning the less commonly taught languages, see P. Lowe, Jr. and C.W. Stansfield, eds., *Second Language Proficiency Assessment: Current Issues, Language in Education: Theory and Practice*, No. 70. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 296 612).

At the secondary school level, schools are beginning to teach languages other than Spanish, French, and German. Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and in some places Arabic, are now taught in several major urban school systems all over the country. With guidance and encouragement from the professional community, state systems will need to adopt proficiency assessment procedures in these languages to enable teachers to meet certification requirements. Such areas of foreign language curricula as placement, syllabus design, course and program evaluation, entry and exit requirements, and required proficiency levels of teaching assistants and teachers will also change as a result of the language-specific proficiency tests (Byrnes, 1987).

## RESEARCH AGENDA

For the moment, the application of the generic guidelines to the LCTLs has raised questions that offer opportunities for new research in the field of foreign language acquisition and learning. A number of scholars involved in the field of second language acquisition and testing have suggested such areas of possible research as the maximum level of proficiency that can be reached under certain conditions, the variables that affect learning, the relationship between second language (L2) acquisition and L2 instruction, and the effect of formal vs. informal learning. Such research calls for interdisciplinary cooperation and training.

At the testing level, researchers are calling attention to issues in the

area of interrater reliability. Examples of these issues are interrater reliability across languages, reliability between government- and ACTFL-certified oral proficiency testers, examination of differences in testing one's own students as opposed to testing someone else's, investigation of possible differences between native and nonnative interviewers with regard to both elicitation procedures and rating, and the maintenance of rater reliability over time.

Most importantly, the establishment of generic guidelines and the subsequent evolution of the proficiency movement provide research opportunities by giving LCTL practitioners a framework within which second language acquisition can be observed and evaluated. This research can be applied to both oral proficiency and the acquisition of receptive skills.

## NOTES

[1]Foreign Language and Areas Studies Fellowships Programs (1988), P 657,20 U.S.C. P 1022.

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Note: This article has been published in *Eric Digest* (December 1988).

# THE 1986 STANFORD ACTFL TRAINING WORKSHOP

**William Leben**
*Stanford University*

## BACKGROUND

Not too many years ago, I attended a meeting of Title VI Center Directors in Washington, which included workshops on a variety of topics of interest to area studies center directors. One of the workshops was devoted to language proficiency testing, a topic that I had never previously encountered in my work as an African language coordinator.

The meeting began abruptly with a declaration by one of the participants that proficiency testing was the wave of the future, the solution to the problems that had plagued language teaching for so many years. I felt as if I had been injected into the middle of a discussion, the first part of which had perhaps taken place behind closed doors. As I tried to follow the substance of the ensuing discussion, I could not help musing that this was the latest bandwagon that area centers were being forced by Washington to jump on, joining or perhaps replacing earlier ones, like the efforts to get us to do more for outreach or to lure more professional school students into our language classes.

My cynical attitude did not last very long. The 1984 Michigan State University workshop on "Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of Teaching Materials for Less Commonly Taught Languages" made clear the importance of communicative competence in language teaching. In addition, the experience of conducting intensive advanced language programs in Africa, in which "advanced" simply meant that students had gone through two years of prior instruction in the language, taught me that it would make good sense to gear our language classes to proficiency (ability to deal with the language as a tool of communication) rather than to achievement (ability to score highly on tests of grammar and vocabulary).

At the Michigan State University Conference, Steve Krashen had documented the values of orienting class time to communicative interactions between instructor and students. It was not only more fun that way, it was also more effective, judging from the assumed goal of oral proficiency. The response of the African language teachers and coordinators there was overwhelmingly positive. Proficiency testing provided a need complement to this idea: if we were to orient our students toward communication in the

language, it was more sensible to focus our testing on their ability to communicate effectively rather than on their ability to remember grammatical constructions and vocabulary per se.

## PROFICIENCY TESTING

We had stumbled on proficiency testing somewhat by accident in the 1982 and 1984 summer intensive Hausa courses in Nigeria. In both instances, we were faced with twelve students who had all completed the requisite course work in introductory and intermediate Hausa, but who differed widely in their ability to function in the language. We had already planned to divide them into four groups of three for the purposes of the course, and we decided that the best criterion for grouping was proficiency. So on the first two days of the course, we administered a batch of written diagnostic tests and individual oral interviews conducted by native speakers in the presence of the program directors. Conducting these tests more or less in a vacuum, with nothing but common sense to go on, pre-disposed me to look favorably at the notion of standardized proficiency testing techniques.

## THE STANFORD WORKSHOP

In the spring of 1985, Stanford's Center for Research in International Studies sponsored a workshop on proficiency testing in French and Spanish, conducted by David Hiple of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). I attended and was surprised and gratified to learn that the basic interviewing techniques were both well established and well motivated. In subsequent conversations with David, I learned that he was interested in developing ways of adapting ACTFL interviewing techniques to testing oral proficiency in less commonly taught languages.

With support from the Stanford/Berkeley Joint Center for African Studies and Stanford's Committee on Research in International Studies, I organized a workshop on "Proficiency Testing in African Languages" at Stanford in the spring of 1986. The workshop was attended by language coordinators representing almost all of the federally funded African studies centers in the U.S. The individual centers indicated their interest in this venture by providing travel funds for their participants on rather short notice. The participants themselves came to the conference with a variety of expectations. The ones I remember ranged from "Let's see what the government wants to shove down our throats this time" to "We need to deal with the enemy out of knowledge rather than out of ignorance."

David Hiple ran the workshop. The first two days were conducted in the regular ACTFL fashion, with introductory lectures on the basic techniques and practice interviews using English as the target language. The group responded positively to the demonstration that on the one hand there were some special skills to learn in testing oral proficiency and that on the other hand the techniques were quite reasonable. It was satisfying to see that, structuring an oral interview on ACTFL guidelines, one could both conduct an interesting, natural conversation with a student and at the same time produce substantial agreement among the observers about where the interviewee's performance fell on the ACTFL scale.

The workshop then focused on adapting the interviewing and evaluation procedures to African languages. After a general discussion of how to transfer our newly acquired skills to domains with linguistic and cultural features that were possibly quite different from those encountered in English, we interviewed one another using Hausa, Swahili, and West African Pidgin as target languages. After critiquing performances of interviewers and interviewees, we called in a set of "real" African language students and interviewed and evaluated them.

## RESULTS

The group came away with the basic impression that transferring proficiency testing skills from English to African languages was less problematic than might have been expected. It was quite striking to see the group agree on ratings of students' performances, even though guidelines for grammatical and cultural criteria for the specific African languages had not been worked out in advance and despite the fact that (apart from the interviewer, who was proficient in the language being tested) many group members were not well versed in the different languages of the interviews. While there were some unresolved feelings about whether these tests tapped a truly representative set of the linguistic and cultural resources relevant to evaluating a student's proficiency in an African language, our shared experience uncovered an interest that has led to a series of more substantive efforts at implementing oral proficiency interviews in African language programs.

# THE 1987 MADISON-MSU TEAM WORKSHOP[1]

**David J. Dwyer**
*Michigan State University*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper summarizes the results of a workshop sponsored by Michigan State University and held on the campus of the University of Wisconsin. This workshop was a follow-up of the earlier Stanford ACTFL workshop (see the Leben article in this volume) and had as a major focus the application of ACTFL oral language proficiency testing to African languages. The specific problem addressed was whether an alternative proficiency testing procedure could be developed for those languages for which there may never be certified ACTFL proficiency testers. This conference organized and coordinated by the author, was conducted by three ACTFL consultants (David Hiple, ACTFL trainer and representative; Sally Magnan, University of Wisconsin and ACTFL trainer for French; and Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania and ACTFL trainer for Arabic). Many representatives from African language programs throughout the United States had also attended the ACTFL proficiency workshop at Stanford University the previous year.[2]

## PROFICIENCY EVALUATION

The Stanford workshop marked a turning of attention to ACTFL oral language proficiency evaluation by the Title VI African Studies Centers. The participants of that workshop concluded that despite some Eurocentric bias, the ACTFL model was based on sound principles. They expressed the belief that, with a reasonable amount of effort, the model could be applied to African languages to provide a reliable and valid means of evaluating learner proficiency. In addition, conference participants agreed to make an effort to achieve ACTFL proficiency certification in English with the aim of working toward developing ACTFL guidelines for the highest priority African languages. They also agreed to work with ACTFL to establish a network of certified evaluators for those languages.[3] Furthermore, participants decided to experiment informally, using the ACTFL model with evaluating students learning African languages.

## BENEFITS OF ACTFL PROFICIENCY TESTING

The 1987 Madison workshop began, following a suggestion of the Stanford conference, with participants identifying a number of important benefits associated with an ACTFL capability for African languages. These benefits are listed in Appendix A. Any such benefit derives from the capacity of the ACTFL model to provide a valid and reliable statement of language (speaking, listening, reading, writing) proficiency which is independent of the manner and methods of teaching and learning, the institution, the learning materials used, and the language itself. This, in effect, provides a common metric which can be used across programs, across languages, and across pedagogical methodologies.

## THE PROBLEM WITH RESPECT TO AFRICAN LANGUAGES

The problem confronting proficiency testing for African languages stems from the fact that Africa is a region of considerable linguistic diversity, having somewhere between 1500 and 2000 languages. In addition, the resources for studying and teaching them in this country are quite limited. It is clear then that, given the present model of training an oral proficiency evaluator for a specific language, certified proficiency testers will never be trained for most of these African languages. The problem has been alleviated somewhat by the development of a priority listing based on the number of speakers, regional, national or international use, and other factors.[4]

## THE TEAM MODEL

As a possible means of coping with this problem, the participants of the workshop were asked to examine an alternative format to the ACTFL oral proficiency interview. This alternative (team) model involves an ACTFL proficiency interview that is not conducted by a single, ACTFL certified, individual proficient in the target language. Instead, the interview is conducted by a team consisting of a proficient speaker of the target language who is not a trained proficiency evaluator and an ACTFL trained and certified proficiency evaluator who is not necessarily proficient in the target language. The team works together to develop a "ratable sample"[5] of the interviewee and the evaluator, on the basis of the sample and subsequent review of the interview, determines the interviewee's proficiency level.

## DISCUSSION OF THE TEAM MODEL

The participants concluded that the team model was promising, but that a number of modifications may be necessary to avoid potential problems. The standard ACTFL interview has the following sequential components: a) warm-up, b) level check to establish the highest level of sustained ability, c) probes to establish the level at which language can no longer be sustained, and d) wind-down. (A brief description of the ACTFL levels of proficiency is given in Appendix B.) This procedure may have to be interrupted by one or two breaks to allow the evaluator and the native speaker to consult on the speech sample that is being obtained. Interviewees should be made aware of such breaks in advance and the breaks should appear as a natural aspect of the interview. One way to achieve this would be to designate one segment of the interview as a role-playing situation.

Participants agreed that instructions for the native speaker need to be developed. These instructions should be relatively brief (one to three pages) explaining the procedure and the native speaker's role in the process and possibly augmented with a video tape further illustrating the procedure. The exact nature of these instructions would be the topic of another workshop (see below).

Participants also agreed that the certification of a team evaluator ought to involve special training such as workshops for Africanists who have already been certified as ACTFL evaluators in a specific language such as English.

The remedies for controlling both evaluator and native speaker biases involve either submitting interview tapes to evaluator teams at other institutions for a second opinion or having other evaluator teams test via telephone interviews.[6] Solutions for evaluator atrophy (arising from infrequent interviewing) and for maintaining level reliability included the holding of annual or biannual refresher courses and the conducting of interviews in one place so that a number of ACTFL teams from different locations could be in attendance.

Most of the attention, however, was given to the question of how the team interview could be structured to provide a ratable sample. Here, three specific suggestions were offered: i) modifying the structure of the interview, ii) special training for the native speaker, and iii) special training for the evaluator.

While all the proposed remedies need to be evaluated through testing and experimentation, the sense of the workshop was that remedies did exist for the above-mentioned problems and that the ACTFL team model did represent a realistic approach to proficiency evaluation for African languages.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

With near consensus on the potential of the team model and its appropriateness for African languages, the group went on to suggest a three year plan to reach these goals:

1988 –A standard ACTFL Workshop possibly using English, French, and Arabic as the languages of certification to be held at the University of Wisconsin.

1989 –A workshop to explore the design of the alternative ACTFL team approach that emphasizes the development of instructions for the native speaker described above to be held at UCLA under the leadership of a group headed by Russell Schuh and including Tucker Childs and Will Leben.

1990 –Two workshops establishing guidelines for the ACTFL proficiency evaluation of Hausa (coordinated by Boston University) and Swahili (coordinated by Yale University).

1990–A second workshop to finalize the development of the ACTFL team model. The time and location of this workshop are yet to be determined.

Another set of activities was suggested by participants. Boston University would begin to archive Hausa proficiency interviews and Yale University would do the same for Swahili. Others expressed interest in making transcripts of the interviews with varying degrees of detail, indicating that such transcripts would be useful for research and that such activities should be included in center proposals.

## NOTES

[1]This is an abridged version of a paper that has appeared elsewhere as Dwyer and Hiple (1987) and Dwyer and Hiple (1988).

[2]Participants included *Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania; Mahdi Alosh, Ohio State University; Ann Biersteker, Yale University; Eyamba Bokamba, University of Illinois; Vicki Carstens, Yale University; Hazel Carter, University of Wisconsin; G. Tucker Childs, University of California at Berkeley; John Chileshe, University of Zambia; Dustin Cowell, University of Wisconsin; Abraham Demoz, Northwestern University; Katherine Demuth, Boston University; Ivan Diboff, Ohio State University; Mallafe Drame, University of Illinois; David Dwyer, Michigan State University; Mohammad Eissa, Northwestern University; *David Hiple, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; Hassan El Nagar, University of Wisconsin; John Hutchison, Boston University; Magdalena Hauner, University of Wisconsin; Patricia Kuntz, University of Wisconsin; Will Leben, Stanford University; Richard Lepine, Northwestern University; Beverly Mack, George Mason University; *Sally Magnan, University of Wisconsin; Leocadie Nahishakiye, University of Wisconsin; Mark Plane, University of Wisconsin; Mohamed A. Sarnireh, University of Wisconsin; Russell Schuh, University of California at Los Angeles; Jennifer Yanco, Boston University. (* The asterisk is used to identify those participants who served as consultants.)

[3]To receive certification as an ACTFL proficiency evaluator, a trainee must be a superior level speaker of the target language, and must demonstrate the ability to elicit full speech samples using standard interview techniques and to rate the samples accurately on the rating scale. Most testers undergo a four-day workshop, followed by a post workshop training phase. In this phase, trainees conduct ten taped interviews with learners at various levels of proficiency in the target language. These tapes are reviewed by the certified trainer and comments are given to the trainee who then conducts an additional fifteen taped interviews, again of various levels, to qualify for certification. If the elicitation technique exhibited in the interviews is deemed adequate and the ratings of proficiency agree with those of the trainer, the trainee will be certified as an ACTFL proficiency evaluator for the target language.

[4]Details concerning this list appear in Dwyer and Wiley, 1981.

[5]A sample is considered ratable when the interview contains evidence that the interviewee can sustain language at the evaluated level, that the interviewee cannot perform consistently at the next highest level, and in the case of a "high" rating, that the interviewee can perform at the next highest level at least 50% of the time.

[6]A partial listing of second opinion evaluation resources is given in Appendix C.

# AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTING[1]

**Katherine Demuth**
*Boston University*

This paper details some of the methods used at Boston University to facilitate communicative competence in African languages. It identifies certain strategies used and shows how the goals of the curriculum design are consistent with those of oral proficiency testing.

## INTRODUCTION

The African language program at Boston University focuses on helping students develop maximally effective oral communication skills in the African languages they are studying. Class size is small (5-10 students) and most students plan to use their language of study in research, work, or travel situations, which will take them to Africa in the near future. It is for these reasons that the program has always had a spoken/communicative competence bias, and it has seen the development of oral proficiency testing guidelines for the teaching of African languages as a positive move in a productive direction. In fact, the incorporation of oral proficiency testing is, in many respects, an extension of the original goals of the African language program. While other language programs, both African and non-African, have resisted the incorporation of proficiency testing guidelines, feeling that its implementation interferes with and even dictates the type of teaching methodologies that would have to be used in the classroom, there has been no such "discord" between the goals and the methods used in the Boston University African Language Program; if anything, the introduction and joint-cooperative development of oral proficiency testing guidelines has helped us articulate, for ourselves, the types of language competence goals we would like our students to achieve.

Realizing that other programs may have different goals that are not met by these new developments, I would like to focus the rest of this discussion toward those programs that do have similar goals, and explore various methodological approaches which the Boston University African Language Program has developed and incorporated into classroom teaching to more effectively meet those goals. The methodological approaches presented here should prove useful for other institutions concerned with attaining similar communicative competence goals. The re-

mainder of this paper will discuss the standard two-year Boston University African Language Program curriculum designed to facilitate oral proficiency. While we are constantly innovating and testing new approaches to the development of oral proficiency skills, the following presents the core around which other developments take place.

## FIRST YEAR COURSE/FIRST SEMESTER

The first semester of the first year course is almost entirely oral; books and written materials are used sparingly. Classes are conducted almost solely in the target language, with little or no English and only a list of relevant vocabulary items which facilitate out of class study. Students are encouraged to listen to tapes of the relevant lessons outside of class. By the end of the first week students can carry out rudimentary greetings and exchanges in the target language.

As the semester progresses students increase their command of the language. They are continually provided with updated vocabulary lists, and given the vocabulary needed to ask about the grammar of the language in the language itself. Development of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and competence with certain conversational topics is facilitated through the use of structured oral exercises that incorporate pictures and other visual aids. Quizzes are oral; for instance, students describe a picture or tell a story; they may also report personal experiences, such as where they went over vacations, how they traveled, who they saw, what they did, and so forth.

About this time the class writes and presents a skit to the rest of the language classes at the semi-annual African Language Program Dinner and Party, where they also cook food from the pertinent region of Africa, learning the names for different food items, dishes, and vocabulary for how to prepare them. Some reading is introduced, and students are encouraged to read on their own over the winter semester break.

The final exam is oral, consisting of student presentations to the class, followed by questions from the class, and an individual "interview" conversation between instructor and student, covering the basic communicative topics of the course. While this is not a formal ACTFL oral proficiency interview, it is similar in that it tests to see whether the student can carry on a conversation which incorporates the material covered in the course. By the end of the first semester students have a working oral facility with the language, and they have had an introduction to cultural aspects of language use and to elementary reading.

## SECOND SEMESTER

During the second semester there is continued focus on developing oral communicative skills, but the methods become more diversified. While oral presentations and conversation continue to be a major component of the classroom, students are expected to incorporate more reading and writing into their out of class work. This work is then discussed in the classroom, in the target language. Films and film-strips are scheduled once a week, providing a rich basis for discussion, which introduces new vocabulary and new insight into the culture. Weekly quizzes, which now include some writing, complement weekly composition assignments, providing an opportunity for refinement of grammatical details and development of creative writing skills.

Students again write and perform a skit for the semi-annual African Dinner/Party, and this time it is video-taped, to be shown in future classes. The skit provides students with an opportunity to work together and express creative talents which often do not surface in other contexts. It focuses their language skills in such a way that there is a noticeable improvement in their verbal abilities. At the same time it involves them in some of the cultural realities which are reflected in the use of the language they are learning. For instance, several of the more successful skits have included the enactment of proverbs, short stories or songs, while others have created 'social commentary' situations where appropriate social behavior is either observed or violated, either in speech or in action.

At the close of the second semester all students are required to give an oral/written report to the class on a topic of their choice. With the assistance of the instructor and outside readings, students learn the new vocabulary needed to discuss their individual topics, and they teach this new vocabulary to the rest of the class. For many of the graduate students this is an opportunity to develop vocabulary, communicative skills, and bibliography in their projected area of future African research. Examples of past presentations have included topics such as health economics in East Africa, oral narratives and praise poems as a source for historical research, regional music from an ethnomusicological viewpoint, and educational experiences of persons from a particular country. This provides students with the opportunity to explore the use of their language of study in the target language itself, learning the vocabulary necessary to communicate to speakers of the language the importance of the work which they will be conducting.

For undergraduate students who may not have immediate research goals in Africa, the final oral/written report also provides an opportunity

for exploring areas of interest. Students at this level are encouraged to integrate their final report with their other academic or non-academic interests. For example, one student was writing a report in an African history class on various aspects of agricultural development in Kenya. His final report was a presentation in Kiswahili which covered some of the same material that he was researching for his other class. Other undergraduate presentations have included African art forms and how they have influenced modern contemporary Western artists, an historical perspective on the discrimination in the delivery of health care to black and white South Africans (student majoring in pre-med), a literary analysis, recitation, and discussion of selected Zulu praise poems (student interested in philosophy of language), and the crafting of a southern African musical instrument, discussion of the historical origins and contemporary uses of the instrument, and how it is played, as well as a musical demonstration; the student sang and played the instrument (student interested in performing arts). In this way, undergraduates are also able to integrate the study of an African language and its culture into their other interests and concerns. In the process, they simultaneously learn more about the culture while improving their language skills. The final project thus provides all students with an opportunity to explore both the oral and written use of the target language in ways most appropriate to their individual interests, improving their command of the language in the process.

At the end of one year of study, students in the African Language Program are given an oral proficiency interview, either by the instructor of the course or by another trained speaker/instructor of the language. This interview is not unlike that given after the first semester, but this time it follows a more formal ACTFL-style rating. While part of the purpose of this interview is to evaluate how well students have learned the basic communicative skills they should have obtained from the class, the actual rating is used for internal purposes of the African language program as a means for evaluating how effective our courses have been at implementing the goals we have set for ourselves. Recall that the focus of the Boston University African Language Program is to help students learn to use the target language in the communicative situations in which they will one day find themselves. The final oral proficiency interview is as much an evaluation of our own success at meeting this goal as it is an evaluation of the students' individual progress.

## SECOND YEAR COURSE

The second year course builds on the skills developed during the first year. There is a continued focus on the development of communicative

skills on an ever widening range of topics. This is achieved through several approaches. First, film strips (without the sound) dealing with various topics (agriculture, education, history, art, political change, and so forth) provide a visual stimulus for development of vocabulary centering around a certain topic. Films are also shown in order to provide a forum for discussion and debate of relevant issues. Grammatical skills are developed and exercised as students discuss and debate the various issues raised. In addition, students are periodically asked to develop oral and written presentations on various topics raised in class or of particular interest to class members. Occasionally "guest speakers" of the target language are invited to class, and students take the opportunity to interview the visitor. Thus, the development of oral skills continues to be the focus of the second year class.

In addition to daily opportunities for discussion, the second year classes become much more heavily involved in reading and writing. Weekly written assignments follow the discussion of films and film strips, thus reinforcing new vocabulary and practice with new grammatical constructions. Short stories, short novels, plays, and poems are also incorporated, providing an additional area for conversation, exchange of ideas with attention focused on particular areas of grammatical detail. Special grammatical components are practiced to facilitate the use of more sophisticated grammatical constructions in both oral and written work.

The second year classes, like the first year classes, present a skit every semester. A research project/report is required at the end of every semester for all students, and an oral interview is included along with a written exam at the end of each semester. At the end of the year, a second oral proficiency exam is conducted in accordance with ACTFL guidelines, again primarily for program internal purposes. The results generally show significant improvement and are shared with the students. The students also have a copy of the general program guidelines and are aware of what types of communicative competence they are expected to have at the end of the course. They therefore make every effort to work toward this goal.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have demonstrated that the goals of the Boston University African Language Program are entirely consistent with those of oral proficiency testing, and the definition of these testing levels have helped us to articulate, both for ourselves and for our students, what the results of the courses should be. This has been extremely helpful for the program in determining where to put our teaching energies and how best to expend our curriculum development resources. It has also given students an im-

mediate sense of satisfaction and accomplishment; course evaluations are extremely high and students consistently report that they learned more in one or two years of Hausa or Swahili than they learned in European languages where a more traditional approach had been applied.

## NOTES

[1]This paper presents a language program design which has been developed over several years through the combined efforts of several linguists and African language program coordinators. I would therefore like to acknowledge the past and ongoing work of my colleagues John Hutchison, Jennifer Yanco, and Stanley Cushingham, who have all contributed in many ways to what the Boston University African Language Program is today. I thank them also for comments on this paper.

# THE ROLE OF PROFICIENCY EVALUATION IN THE 1987 INTENSIVE ADVANCED HAUSA INSTITUTE (GPA)

**Jennifer J. Yanco**
*Boston University*

## INTRODUCTION

The 1987 Hausa Groups Projects Abroad Program was an eight week (June 22 to August 16) intensive language institute held in Niamey, Niger, and administered by Boston University in cooperation with the Universite de Niamey. Ten students participated in the program. Of these, four had studied Hausa for the equivalent of three years, five for two years, and one for just one year.

The institute consisted of three major components:

1. Formal classroom instruction
2. Individual research
3. Social and cultural activities (performances, field trips, lectures, participation in local celebrations)

All instruction was competency-based, that is, our foremost goal was to increase students' skills in using the language, rather than their knowledge about the structure of the language. While attention was paid to all skill areas (reading, writing, oral comprehension and production), the program was overwhelmingly oral in orientation. Classroom work, while it centered around a text that students had prepared and included the preparation of written exercises as well, nevertheless focused on the presentation of oral reports, story telling, theater, discussion. Social and cultural activities were designed to make use of and to improve students' speaking and comprehension skills and to provide students with the opportunity to participate in activities requiring interaction with Hausa speakers. Finally, the individual research projects entailed preparing a written proposal, extensive interviewing of Hausa speakers, and the presentation of a final oral report to fellow students and staff.

Students worked on their writing skills by keeping a daily journal in Hausa, in which they recorded their activities as well as their reactions to their new surroundings. These journals were corrected on a weekly basis by both project directors. Over the course of the eight-week institute there was substantial improvement in the written skills of each of the students. As a final written assignment, each student was required to submit a writ-

ten version of the report on his or her research.

## THE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW

While the journal and final report served as materials for evaluating students' proficiency in the written language, our main emphasis in evaluation, as in instruction, was on oral skills.

As a result of our participation in the Madison workshop, we decided to use an ACTFL-style interview for purposes of student evaluation. In the course of the program, we administered three interviews per student: one at the beginning of the program, one midway through, and one at the end of the program. All interviews were taped and transcribed for future use in developing guidelines. The interview consisted of the following parts:

1. **Warm-up**: Examiner(s) and student exchange greetings and chat. The purpose of this is to put the student at ease.
2. **Level check**: The examiner(s) finds the highest level at which the student is comfortably able to sustain communication.
3. **Probe**: The examiner(s) probes to higher levels until the student's language breaks down. This is done more than once to be certain that a level has been reached at which the student is incapable of sustaining conversation.
4. **Wind-down**: Like the warm-up, this serves to put the student at ease and to end the interview in a way that leaves the student with positive feelings about the interview.

As an interview tool we also used situation cards, which we developed ourselves, using as models those prepared by ACTFL. These present students with culturally appropriate "problem situations" in which the student must play an assigned role in resolving a conflict. The cards we developed were especially adapted to the cultural context of Hausaphone West Africa. These were particularly useful in level checks.

## EVALUATION GUIDELINES

As evaluation criteria we adopted a set of functional guidelines developed at the Madison workshop in the spring of 1987 (see the Biersteker article in this volume). These guidelines included functional specifications for each of three major levels, each with a further division into low, mid, and high. The specifications for each level set out quite clearly and language-independently what an individual must be able to do in the language to have reached that level. Below is the list of criteria.

**NOVICE**

**Low 1** Responds to isolated words and high frequency phrases. Little evidence of interactive ability aside from ability to exchange simple, common greetings.

**Mid 2** Use of short phrases to express elementary needs and courtesies. Use of isolated words and phrases. Uses partner's words and structures in responses consisting of isolated words and phrases.

**High 3** Emerging evidence of creativity, but heavy reliance on learned material. Limited to concrete situations. Emerging ability to interact in an exchange of personal information, for instance, responds to and formulates simple statements and basic questions.

**INTERMEDIATE**

**Low 4** Can ask and answer (wh)-questions. Can initiate and respond to simple statements. Can interact in task oriented social situations. Can maintain face-to-face communication but repetition and sympathetic interlocutor required. Able to maintain minimal interchanges. Responds to and formulates simple statements and questions regarding the personal.

**Mid 5** Can ask and answer large variety of questions beyond immediate needs. Participates in conversation. In case of misunderstanding, makes efforts to continue conversation on topic or able to query by rephrasing. Maintains flow of conversation on concrete topics. May use and require careful speech.

**High 6** Initiates, sustains, and closes conversation. Emerging evidence of connected discourse, for instance, general conversation with number of strategies, able to elaborate on some of own points or those of interlocutor.

**ADVANCED LEVELS**

**Advanced 7** Full participant in conversation. Handles with confidence full range of tasks. More sophisticated use of communicative strategies. Able to rephrase without simplifying. Able to control and direct interchange by using a variety of communicative strategies, for instance, changing the subject, summarizing, skillfully evading questions, taking various roles in the interaction.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Advanced Plus 8** | **Emerging evidence of ability to support opinions, explain in detail, hypothesize. Skillful use of paraphrase and circumlocution. Emerging evidence of skill in paraphrase in dialogue, in ability to effectively argue/debate points, negotiate issues. Uses circumlocution to seek definitions.** |
| **Superior 9** | **Commands wide variety of interactive and discourse strategies, including argumentation. Command of strategies listed in advanced plus. Emerging evidence of ability to handle registers.** |

## ADMINISTRATION OF THE INTERVIEWS: RATINGS AND RESULTS

Interviews were conducted three times during the institute, at the beginning, midway through, and in the final week. Progress from the first to the third interview for the group is noted in the table below:

| Level at first interview | Level at third interview | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 1 student |
| 2 | 5 | 3 students |
| 3 | 5 | 1 student |
| 3 | 6 | 1 student |
| 4 | 5 | 1 student |
| 4 | 6 | 2 students |
| 5 | 6 | 1 student |

We thus had four students who jumped three levels over the course of the program, four who jumped two levels, and two who jumped one level.

The proficiency interview served as a useful and accurate measure of students' ability to speak and understand Hausa. We were particularly impressed by the high degree of interrater reliability. The table below refers to the interviews conducted midway through the program. These interviews were rated by three different raters, each working independently. As can be noted, there were only three cases in which the raters did not arrive at the same assessment, and in these cases the differences are always a matter of one level within one of the three major categories (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced).

Interview #2

| Student | Rater #1 | Rater #2 | Rater #3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |
| 2 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |
| 3 | IH (6) | IH (6) | IH (6) |
| 4 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |
| 5* | IL (4) | IL/M (4/5) | IM (5) |
| 6 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |
| 7* | IL (4) | IL (4) | IM (5) |
| 8* | NH (3) | NH (3) | NM (2) |
| 9 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |
| 10 | IM (5) | IM (5) | IM (5) |

*Disagreement among raters

## WIDER APPLICATIONS OF THE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW

We found the proficiency interview to be a useful, reliable, and fairly straightforward way to evaluate students' oral skills. It provided both the student and staff with an accurate assessment of the student's progress and allowed identification of particular areas in which the student needed work. Aside from assessing students' progress throughout the institute, the proficiency interview could further contribute to the success of intensive summer institutes in the following ways:

1. Results of proficiency interviews could be used in screening candidates. Our experience showed that neither the number of years a candidate had studied the language nor the recommendations of instructors were reliable measures of a student's level. Students who had studied for three years were not necessarily more proficient than the others, nor was the student who had had just one year of study the least proficient in the group. If training in conducting the interview were available to more African language teachers and if prospective participants in summer programs could provide interview scores as part of their applications, we would have a better chance of weeding out those who are simply not at a level to profit from the intensive course. Furthermore, candidates from outside academia who have gained fluency via some route other than formal study could arrange to be tested and could submit results of proficiency interviews. This would provide selection committees with more reliable measures of candidates' proficiency.

2. Results of proficiency interviews could be useful as a tool for evaluating the efficacy of individual intensive summer programs relative to one another. Analysis of results could facilitate identification of strong and weak points in each institute and could lead to concrete improvements in future institutes.

In order for these recommendations to be incorporated into our summer programs, efforts in developing interview techniques and in training interviewers need to be continued. In particular, more work needs to be done in developing the team model of interviewing in which a trained linguist-interviewer works together with a native speaker in conducting the interview. This would entail the training of native speaker instructors in-country.

# THE 1988 MADISON WORKSHOP ON ACTFL CERTIFICATION

**Linda Hunter**
*University of Wisconsin*

The University of Wisconsin-Madison hosted a workshop on "Oral Proficiency Interviews" on May 18-21, 1988. The ACTFL workshop was an intensive, four day tester training workshop to prepare participants to administer and rate oral proficiency interviews. The workshop was followed by a three to four month training period. In the post-workshop phase, participants conducted 25 cassette-recorded interviews in two cycles at their home institutions and sent the interviews to their workshop trainer. The trainer evaluated the interviews and recommended the participant for certification as an oral proficiency tester.

The trainers at the May workshop were Sally Magnan (French), Martha Marks (ESL), and Virginia Maurer (ESL).

The participants included:

| Name | Title VI Institution | Teaching Language | Training Language |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dustin Cowell | Wisconsin | Arabic | ESL |
| Antonia Folarin | Yale | Yoruba | ESL |
| Carolyn Harford | Michigan State | Swahili | ESL |
| Magdalena Hauner | Wisconsin | Swahili | ESL |
| Linda Hunter | Wisconsin | Hausa | ESL |
| Hugo Kamya | Boston | Swahili | ESL |
| Patricia Kuntz | Wisconsin | Swahili | ESL |
| Richard Lepine | Northwestern | Swahili | ESL |
| Eyamba Bokamba | Illinois | Lingala/Swahili | French |
| Hazel Carter | Wisconsin | Shona/Kikongo | French |

The participants at the May workshop recorded interviews in Arabic, ESL, and French. The ACTFL certifications in Arabic, ESL, and French are the first step towards certification in African language testing. The next steps were to be taken at the two meetings listed below:

African Studies Association, October 28 -31, 1988

At this meeting oral proficiency interview tapes of African languages were to be evaluated to determine the standards for rating criteria.

African Linguistics Conference, April 19 - 23, 1989

For this meeting, a session on rating African languages that are less frequently taught was scheduled.

# THE 1989 WORKSHOP ON TEAM TESTING

**Russell Schuh**
*University of California at Los Angeles*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the African language teaching community in the United States has been active in the oral proficiency teaching and testing movement. There have been a number of meetings and workshops around the country studying needs for African language teaching and modern techniques of language instruction and providing training in oral proficiency testing, especially using the oral proficiency interview and the guidelines developed by ACTFL for the evaluation of interviewees' performances. As a result of these workshops, a number of African language teachers have become ACTFL certified testers in European languages.

Certain problems particular to African languages became evident early in this period. First, there are no agreed standards for proficiency testing in African languages, much less certified testers to apply those standards. Developing certification procedures and, eventually, certifying testers will therefore have to be a "bootstrap" operation. Second, there are relatively few African languages teachers and relatively many languages being taught. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect certification of testers for any but the most commonly taught languages in the near future.

## THE FOCUS OF THE UCLA WORKSHOP

It was this second problem that the UCLA workshop was meant to address. Is it possible to develop a reliable model for assessing the oral proficiency of students in languages for which there are no certified testers? The model which we proposed to explore is one using a testing team (see the Dwyer contribution in this volume). One member of the team, the *tester*, would be a superior level speaker of the target language who may or may not have some proficiency testing experience but who is not a certified proficiency tester. The other member of the team, the *advisor*, would be a certified proficiency tester who may have no experience with the target language. The tester would conduct the actual interview entirely in the target language; the advisor would orient the tester to the format of the interview, consult with the tester at a mid-point in the interview in order to pinpoint

areas where the sample needed to be amplified, and arrive at a final rating through consultation with the tester.

The organizer of the UCLA workshop, Russell G. Schuh, invited each of the ten federally funded African studies centers to send representatives. At least one representative from each of these universities attended. In addition, Cornell University, which is in the process of expanding its African studies program and its African language offerings, sent two representatives. Though there are other African language programs around the country for which this workshop could have been of possible interest, it seemed desirable to limit the number present for two reasons. First, since this was a workshop rather than a conference or symposium, a small group would permit more active participation by all those in attendance. Second, this workshop was really meant as an experiment using an untried model rather than a training session for a proven model. Therefore, preference was given to persons who had already had some training, or at least exposure, to the oral proficiency interview, which was to serve as the basis for the experimental model.

The federally funded centers had budgeted funds to allow members of their centers to attend. UCLA used this budget item to pay the ACTFL stipend and to defray the costs of the workshop. The universities with members in attendance contributed $200 each toward the cost of the workshop in addition to paying the travel expenses of their representatives. There were twenty-two persons in attendance in addition to the workshop leader, David Hiple.

The UCLA workshop extended over two days. The first day was spent reviewing the oral proficiency interview (OPI) model, the ACTFL rating scale, and possible approaches to applying this model to the team testing format. During the morning of the first day, David Hiple explained the structure of the OPI, including warm-up, level checks, probes, and wind-down. He also presented the concept of role play as a technique for level checking and probing. These concepts were made concrete by viewing and discussing videotapes of interviews at various levels in English, Russian, and Hebrew. This review profited from discussion by members of the workshop who have become certified testers in English or French.

## THE TEAM TESTING MODEL

The remainder of the first day and over an hour of the second morning was spent discussing the team testing model. The model as envisioned by David Hiple had the following structure:

1. Discussion between members of the testing team on conduct of the

interview.

2. Explanation to the interviewee (by the advisor) of the structure of the interview.
3. Initial part of the interview, including warm-up, level checks, and probes.
4. A mid-interview conference between the advisor and the tester during which time the interviewee would go to another room and study a "Material Review File."[1]
5. Final part of the interview, which would include (1) a role play selected by the team during the mid-interview conference with the intent of providing level checks and/or probes lacking during the initial part and (2) discussion utilizing something from the "Material Review File." The interview would end with the wind-down.
6. Rating of the interviewee by the team.

There was considerable discussion about the nature and advisability of the mid-interview conference. There were suggestions for alternative formats, such as assessment of the interviewee's "floor" at a time prior to the interview so that the actual interview could be done without interruption and be aimed solely at level checks and probes. In the end, the workshop proceeded with the envisioned format.

The second day of the workshop was devoted almost entirely to practice interviews. David Hiple served as advisor for all the interviews and workshop participants who were native speakers of the target languages were the testers. There were four practice interviews, two in Swahili, one in Yoruba, and one in Hausa. In all but one interview, the testers had had no previous experience in conducting OPI's. We had assembled a "Material Review File" consisting of several picture postcards of African scenes and some advertisements from African magazines and newspapers. The interviewees all used this same file during the mid-interview conference.

Following the format above, the advisor briefly explained to each interviewee the structure of the interview. The conference between advisor and tester was not necessary since all the testers had attended the workshop discussions. The Testers then began the interviews, normally with a few greetings and general questions such as the interviewee's name, what he/she was studying, and so forth. In each case this part of the interview lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to 1/2 hour. The interviewee was then given the "Materials Review Packet" and sent to another room while the first part of the interview was discussed. Instead of a conference between advisor and tester, the group as a whole discussed the first part of the interview. Since several of those present understood each of the target languages, they were able to assess the nature of the sample elicited and to offer ad-

vice on the type of data required for a definitive rating. The advisor selected a role play card appropriate for eliciting the type of data needed, and the interviewee was called back in to complete the interview. This consisted of a role play, discussion of something from the "Material Review File," and a wind-down.

The interviewees for the workshop all fell somewhere within the intermediate range, so we were not able to test this model at the higher levels. However, there was a consensus that the model did provide a means for eliciting and evaluating a sample which would permit an accurate rating on the ACTFL scale. Still, certain problems arose. The interviews were much longer than is desirable, most running close to an hour. This was caused partly by the extra time taken up by the full group discussion during the mid-interview conference and partly because of the inexperience of the testers, who tended to carry particular topics in the interview further than necessary. This latter problem is one that will have to be addressed as the model is applied. One problem that was anticipated in the first day's discussion but which did not materialize was concern over whether the mid-interview conference would tend to fragment the interview and cause a loss of momentum. In fact, we arrived at a consensus that this break in the interview was beneficial for the interviewee. This break seemed to provide a period of relaxation and reflection, such that when the interviewee returned, he/she was able to perform at least as well, and perhaps better than during the first phase. The latter part of the interview in virtually every case provided the data necessary for deciding between levels, say intermediate-low vs. intermediate-mid.

During the closing discussion following the interviews, the members of the workshop expressed the belief that the model as examined seemed to be a viable tool for proficiency testing in languages where there is little hope of having certified testers anytime soon. The workshop was also useful in once again bringing together a group of Africanists who have been involved in proficiency teaching and testing so that we could discuss our experiences during the past year or so and impart some of these ideas to a broader group.

## NOTES

[1]The "Material Review File," which would serve as the basis for some of the second part of the interview, would consist of pictures, magazine or newspaper articles, advertisements, and so forth, which could stimulate discussion at any of various levels on culturally appropriate topics.

# REPORT ON THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY PROFICIENCY WORKSHOP

**John Hutchison**
*Boston University*

The Functional Guidelines Workshop took place from March 30 through April 1, 1990, and was organized by John Hutchison of Boston University. Most of the workshop was run by a consultant with whom the group had been working for some time, David Hiple, of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Prior to the conference, oral proficiency interviews in Hausa and Swahili were circulated for review. Following is a list of attendants:

| | |
|---|---|
| Frank O. Arasanyin | Yale University |
| Ann Biersteker | Yale University |
| Eyamba Bokamba | University of Illinois-Urbana |
| Vicki Carstens | Cornell University |
| Gitahi Gititi | Yale University |
| Carolyn Harford | Michigan State University |
| Magdelena Hauner | University of Wisconsin-Madison |
| Tom Hinnebusch | University of California-Los Angeles |
| David Hiple | American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) |
| John Hutchison | Boston University |
| Hugo Kamya | Boston University |
| Will Leben | Stanford University |
| Alamin Mazrui | Ohio State University |
| Sam Mchombi | University of California-Berkeley |
| Lupenga Mphande | Ohio State University |
| Karl Reynolds | Boston University |
| Sandra Sanneh | Yale University |

Given that the majority of the participants were involved with the teaching of Swahili, it was agreed that the workshop would concentrate on making progess toward developing oral proficiency guidelines for Swahili, and that the other language groups represented could meet separately to discuss problems associated with oral proficiency testing in their languages.

The two-day proficiency workshop was conducted by ACTFL oral proficiency trainer David Hiple. More than a day and a half were devoted to

analyzing videotaped oral proficiency interviews conducted by trained interviewers and to practicing interviews by the participants, many of whom had had previous ACTFL proficiency training. Each practice interview was critiqued and together the group assigned an oral proficiency level for the interviewee. The need for language-specific guidelines for the oral proficiency interview was discussed, and the need to establish proficiency guidelines for Swahili was reiterated throughout the workshop.

The afternoon of the second day ended with a discussion of the pros and cons of establishing guidelines along the ACTFL model. The group agreed that it was important to work toward that goal, but that it would take time. It was concluded that the interviews made during the workshop would be copied and circulated to all of the Swahili-teaching programs in the country, and that an effort would be made to organize a proficiency guidelines development workshop for next year. All were encouraged to begin trying to capture and characterize the elements of the interviews at the various levels.

On the third day, the following presentations were given:

Hugo Kamya: "Demonstration of Oral Proficiency Testing Using a Language Consultant"

Eyamba Bokamba: "Funding Opportunities for the Less-Commonly Taught Languages through the Ford Foundation"

Ann Biersteker and Will Leben: "Using Videotaped Folktales in the African Language Classroom"

All participants agreed that they would continue to pursue ACTFL certification among their members and that they would support the Indiana ACTFL workshop in May 1990. They expressed a desire to have one or more of their members eventually be certified as tester trainers, so that the African languages group would then be able to train their own testers and no longer be dependent on ACTFL, which some of the group found to be extremely expensive. There was a consensus that the group should work to formalize their team teaching technique together with a language consultant (as demonstrated by Hugo Kamya in his presentation). The Hausa-teaching participants agreed that they would also begin working on guidelines for the Hausa language based on interviews which they had already archived.

# APPENDIX A

**Projects of the Title VI African Studies Centers Concerning African Languages and Proficiency Evaluation**

1979 Workshop: Needs and Priorities for the Teaching of African Languages in the United States in the 1980s. Michigan State University (Dwyer and Wiley, 1981). This workshop led to a list that identified 82 major national and international African languages that need to be taught when requested in the United States.

1984 Workshop: Guidelines for the Development of Writing and Evaluating African Language Materials. Michigan State University: Dwyer. (Dwyer, 1986a)

1985 Project: aimed at the identification of resources on a worldwide basis available for the study of African languages including a preliminary evaluation of such materials. Michigan State University: David Dwyer. (Dwyer, 1986)

1985 Workshop: focusing on the initial exploration of the suitability of the ACTFL oral proficiency testing model for African languages. Stanford University: William Leben.

1985 Project: The Development of Working ACTFL Guidelines for Swahili, Hausa, and Arabic. Indiana University: Roxana Ma Newman.

1986 Team Approach to Proficiency Evaluation.

1987 A joint project by Bennett and Biersteker to develop proficiency profiles for Hausa, Swahili, and Arabic (Bennett and Biersteker).

1987 The New Wisconsin Workshop

1985 The University of Illinois Project for CAI in Swahili and Wolof.

## APPENDIX B

### ACTFL Levels*

| | |
|---|---|
| SUPERIOR: | Can support opinions, hypothesize, talk about abstract topics. Gets into, through, and out of an unfamiliar situation. |
| ADVANCED PLUS: | Can perform at the superior level sometimes, but not consistently. |
| ADVANCED: | Can narrate and describe in past, present, and future time, and get into, through, and out of a survival situation with a complication. |
| INTERMEDIATE HIGH: | Can perform at the advanced level sometimes, but not consistently. |
| INTERMEDIATE MID: | Can create with language, ask and answer questions on familiar topics. |
| INTERMEDIATE LOW: | Gets into, through, and out of a simple survival situation. |
| NOVICE HIGH: | Can perform at the intermediate level sometimes, but not consistently. |
| NOVICE MID: | No functional ability. |
| NOVICE LOW: | Limited to memorized material. |
| 0 | No ability in the language whatsoever. |

*Source: Part of an ACTFL packet handed out at the workshop. This example is intended to be only a brief characterization of the ACTFL proficiency levels.

# APPENDIX C

## Language Priorities Categories

Group A Languages (Highest Priority)

1. Akan
2. Amharic
3. Arabic
4. Chewa/Nyanja
5. Fulfulde (Fula/Peulh/Fulani)
6. Hausa
7. Igbo
8. Kongo
9. Malagasy
10. Mandingo
11. Ngala (Lingala)
12. Oromo (Galla)
13. Ruanda/Rundi
14. Sango
15. Shona
16. Somali
17. Sotho/Tswana (Ndebele)
18. Swahili
19. Tigrinya
20. Umbundu
21. Wolof
22. Xhosa/Zulu/Swazi
23. Yoruba

Group B Languages (Second Priority)

1. Anyi/Baule
2. Bameleke
3. Bemba
4. Berber
5. Chokwe/Ruund
6. Efik/Ibibio
7. Ganda (Luganda)
8. Gbaya
9. Gbe (Ewe/Mina/Fon)
10. Kalenjin (Nandi/Kipsigis)
11. Kamba (Kikamba)
12. Kanuri
13. Kikuyu
14. Kimbundu
15. Krio/Pidgin (Cluster)
16. Luba
17. Luo/Acholi/Lango
18. Luyia
19. Makua/Lomwe
20. Mende/Bandi/Loko
21. Mongo/Nkundo
22. Moore/Mossi
23. Nubian
24. Senufo
25. Songhai
26. Sukuma/Nyamwezi
27. Tiv
28. Tsonga
29. Yao/Makonde (Bulu)
30. Zande

Group C Languages (Third Priority)

1. Dinka (Agar/Bor/Padang)
2. Edo (Bini)
3. Gogo (Chigogo)
4. Gurage
5. Hehe
6. Idoma
7. Igbira (Ebira)
8. Ijo
9. Isle de France Creole
10. Kpelle
11. Kru/Bassa
12. Lozi (Silozi)
13. Maasai
14. Meru
15. Nama (Damara)
16. Nuer
17. Nupe
18. Nyakusa
19. Nyoro
20. Sara
21. Serer
22. Sidamo
23. Soninke
24. Suppire
25. Susu
26. Temne
27. Teso/Turkana
28. Tumbuka
29. Venda

# APPENDIX D

## Advantages of Oral Proficiency Assessments

Proficiency-based language requirements

Many institutions have begun looking towards a competency based language requirement which could easily be based on the attainment of a given ACTFL level.

Title VI level two fellowships

In the event that a second level of National Resource Fellowship becomes established, the applicant would have to demonstrate a designated threshold level of proficiency in order to qualify for the fellowship.

Summer institute abroad fellowships

ACTFL ratings could provide a fair and dependable means for identifying those students who would benefit most from a summer institute abroad.

Uniform expectations

As long as ACTFL evaluations remain valid and reliable, they can provide the basis of establishing uniform expectations of learner performance in the African language programs in this country.

Field research grants

ACTFL ratings will make it easier for applicants to demonstrate that their language proficiency is adequate to conduct the field research that they have proposed.

Career opportunities

Language teachers (Swahili, Hausa, and Arabic) will be able to demonstrate their level of language proficiency when being considered for a language teaching situation. Other professions, such as those in development, the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service, may also benefit from the availability of these proficiency ratings.

Evaluating language programs

Having established uniform expectations for learner achievement on a language by language basis, individual programs can examine the relative effectiveness of their methodologies, program structure and materials.

Serving as the basis for proficiency profiling

Some work has been initiated (Bennett, Biersteker, and Dihoff) towards the development of diagnostic proficiency profiles which can be used to give both teachers and students alike a clearer understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and in so doing identify the areas which need to be developed to move on to a higher level of proficiency.

## APPENDIX E

### Preliminary Listing of Participants Willing to Review Proficiency Interviews for Specific Languages

| University | Name | Languages |
|---|---|---|
| Berkeley | Tucker Childs | Kisi |
| | Others | Yoruba, Igbo, Swahili |
| Boston | Katherine Demuth | Sesotho/Setswana, Swahili |
| | John Hutchison | Hausa, Bambara, Kanuri |
| | Jennifer Yanco | Lingala, Zarma/Songhai |
| George Mason | Beverly Mack | Hausa |
| Illinois | Eyamba G. Bokamba | Lingala, Swahili |
| | Mallafe Drame | Wolof, Mandinka |
| Northwestern | Muhammad S. Eissa | Arabic |
| | Richard Lepine | Swahili |
| Ohio State | Mahdi Alush | Arabic |
| UCLA | Russell G. Schuh | Hausa |
| Wisconsin | Hazel Carter | Shona, Tonga, Kongo |
| | Patricia Kuntz | Yoruba |
| | Mark Plane | Swahili |
| Yale | Ann Biersteker | Swahili, Kikuyu |
| | Vicki Carstens | Yoruba, Swahili |
| | Others | Zulu, Shona, Setswana, and Amharic |
| Stanford | Will Leben | Hausa |
| Michigan State | David Dwyer | Krio, West African Pidgin English, Mende |
| | Others | Amharic, Swahili, Hausa |

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